

CLAY MODELLING.

I AM writing this paper under the pine trees of the Black Forest, where I have no books to refer to or other authorities to consult, so I can do no other than give you the principles and laws that to my mind underlie all Art teaching, and which I have woven into the first lessons in Clay Modelling. There are two distinct Schools, or rather *Classes*, of Clay Modelling in England at the present moment. The subject is a new one and has only been seriously taken up by teachers the last three years. The natural consequence is that pedagogues, who have received no Art training themselves, are endeavouring to tack a system of Clay Modelling on to old lines, and the result is a course which is dry, stilted, and so utterly devoid of Art principles that the artistic side of our children's natures is never roused—in fact, a system of dry bones, alike wearisome to teacher and pupil. Ruskin told us twenty years ago that South Kensington would retard Art in England for at least two generations. We now see the fulfilling of his prophecy. South Kensington is a School of *Design*, not a School of *Art*. It was established for the education of our designers of carpets, cloths, papers, and other materials—in fact, Commercial Art, which in a Country of commerce, a "Nation of Shopkeepers," was just and proper. Unfortunately, at the same time, no provision was made for the education of our young artists, and the result is that the spirit of the more formal Design has crept into our Art training. When you hear that in twenty years not *one* Artist of eminence has been sent forth by South Kensington, you will understand the force of Ruskin's remark. All our known Artists have been abroad in foreign Studios. I was first trained in a School of Art in England, and then went to a Paris Studio, and when there not a week passed without English young men and women coming over from South Kensington and other Art Schools, and after a month's study one and all regretted their wasted years in England. You wonder why I digress from my subject in this manner. My reason

is that I want you to realise that there is another system of Art training in the world than our confined and stilted one. Most of us offer dry bones to our pupils, and I want you to realise that it is possible to give them instead a flowery feast which one and all will enjoy. You may also say that your children *may* be designers—but not one will become an Artist. True, and I have no desire to create a multitude of starving and impotent makers of pictures; but I maintain that your future designers, if brought up on true principles, will design better and be better able to compete with the rest of the world.

Are our present designs adopted by our European cousins? With the exception of Lewis Day and William Morris, not one of our designers is known abroad. The reason is, that although the teaching of design at our Schools of Art is good, the Students have not in their earliest years been trained in true Art principles. Those teachers who are now endeavouring to form a scheme of Clay Modelling on design only are the outcome of the system I have just condemned. Why should we teachers not learn from the mistakes of our forefathers, and instead of again retarding English Art by adopting their system *in toto*, take from them the grain but leave the chaff. We have as a class never had such an opportunity as we have now of starting afresh and aright, and I beg of you all to be pioneers in this good work and to carefully consider my points and study true Art principles, so that you pass the best teaching on to your children. I do not venture to claim these as my own. I have learnt them in the studios of the greatest Painters and Sculptors in France and Germany.

You will all agree that in order to develop the Artistic nature of the child, the following points must be considered:—

- I., *Form*, which includes accuracy of eye and proportion.
 - II., *Design*, which is of course included in our system but does not play the principal part in it, as in the Manchester Scheme.
 - III., *Imagination*, which exists in all children and is generally lost through lack of practice and wise training.
 - IV., *Texture*: The eye is first trained to observe differences of texture as, for instance, in the skin of an apple and that of an orange, and the hand is then educated to produce these variations on the clay model.
 - V., The hand is trained throughout the Course to obey the head.
- We will briefly again run through these heads, and show how our Scheme cultivates them.

I., *Form*. We insist on each child having its own model. If the teacher, for instance, models an apple before the child, the child following each step with his own clay, it may learn attention and concentration, but it does not learn form or sense of proportion. This faculty we train in the last but one stage of every lesson. Proportion comes at the beginning, when the children put their bits of clay together until they reach the size of their model—another important reason for the separate models. Then comes the next step, the first rough appearance of form, when, if the model is round, the clay is made the same; if flat, the clay also. Then come the additions, such as the stalk and tips, &c.; then the most important part of the lesson, the *exact* Form and likeness of the model. Individuality is exercised when each child tries to make the depressions, the elevations, the inequalities of his own model, and does not blindly imitate his teacher's one model, so that the five or six models resemble each other as much as a row of pins. This—the highest power, with the exception of the Imagination or Conception—is thus carefully trained from the earliest years. Perhaps you say, We do not wish to train Artists; we want to turn out from our schools useful men and women. A Clergyman's wife asked me the other day, "Why do you teach Clay Modelling in the school? what good does it do the girls? It would be much better in my opinion if they learnt housekeeping." My answer is, that the education of form and accuracy of eye will help every boy and girl to perform better and more accurately their future life duties—whether they be in College or in the highest society.

II., *Design*. This we teach more by encouraging the inventive faculties of the children than by setting them to copy other designs. We "grown-ups" little realise the difficulties of producing two sides exactly alike. If you do try to copy one of the Bas-reliefs of an antique design, you spend your time in measuring, and strive to make the left side balance the right, and that is all the lesson teaches you. The design may be very beautiful and its Creator who felt it growing must have had intense pleasure in his work of Art. Why? Because his spirit of invention and conception was roused. But to us who copy, only the mechanical remains—therefore ask your children to design you a cup with a pattern, or a key, or a box lid, and so on.

III., *Imagination*. This, as we have just seen, can be trained through design. After the first course has been gone through, it would also be well to give the children a subject, such as a boat, a cradle with baby in it, a cat sitting—(never model an animal on

four legs without a wire or match in each leg). If you have had a lesson on a Wild Indian, let them model one with gun, and knife, and moccasin, or an Esquimaux with his fur coat and hood. A good exercise is also to show the class a model—such as a door knob, a top, a fruit—and after letting them look at it for a few minutes, withdraw it from their gaze and make them model it from memory.

IV., *Texture*. This is considered a most important point in Foreign Studios. An orange with the skin of an apple is not true, neither is a melon with the texture of a wool ball. To get texture we resort to various dodges—a damp thumb helps to get very many. I have seen the rough end of a piece of wood produce the texture of a beautiful dress.

V. And so we reach our last point, which I think I have sufficiently proved in the previous points, namely, that we train the hand to obey the head. We all know how a little child first attempts to draw. He sees as clearly and as straight as you and I do, probably much more truly; but the hand cannot obey, and so the first drawings are crude, and quite unrecognisable. Then our training begins, and step by step the little ones learn how to direct and how to obey.

We will now examine the Manchester Scheme under the same heads. The exponents first maintain that no objects of Nature must be copied; that no great Artist has modelled them. If you go some day into the Louvre in Paris, and the Galleries in Italy, you will find many modelled fruits held or placed by the sides of the greatest Statues. In the British Museum I was looking last week at a most interesting basket with modelled fruit in it—apple, pear, nuts, etc., which had been made by a Greek hundreds of years ago, and which had been found in a child's tomb. Some authorities argue, from their presence in so many children's tombs, that children were taught to model in this manner, and that this was probably the work of the little dead child. I agree that some forms of nature ought not to be copied; for instance, flowers, which from the thinness of their leaves are not suitable for clay—only the solid should be reproduced in such a material.

I., *Form*. None is taught, because no model is presented to the eye. The first course consists in rolling little balls—a purely mechanical action—then flattening them, and with the finger making a depression in the centre. When a child has made two of these he has got all he can out of the exercise, for it is nothing more. But no, they make scores, and on squared slates arrange

them in patterns. Bye and bye the child rolls a young snake and then makes patterns with the depressed balls, and rolls, and I know not at this stage whether the pupils or balls are the most depressed.

II., *Design*. This is said to be the principal aim of this Scheme. Under Head I. I think I have shown that this is purely mechanical.

III. *Imagination* is not fostered in the slightest.

IV. Neither is *Texture*.

V. The hand is taught to obey the head, but this only to a very limited extent, and only teaches a few actions instead of a great number.

The pupils are moreover trained to roll their clay on the tables. This ought always to be done between the palms of the hands, so that the child *feels* the modelling.

In this System modelling with the fingers is recommended. The consequence is, that as the fingers are hotter than the thumbs and the tips are smaller, that the clay quickly dries, and the teacher is grieved to find at the end of the lesson that the models are cracked and spoilt. By keeping a wet sponge between two children, and teaching them only to model with their thumbs this difficulty is altogether surmounted.

Train your children, my dear fellow-teachers, to recognise the true and beautiful, and then this wonderful world will be full of keen interest to them, and in the future they will rise up and call you blessed.

MRS. F. STEINTHAL.

"THE ART OF READING."

THE above was the title of a lecture given by the Rev. Professor Shuttleworth last June to the Hyde Park and Bayswater Branch of the P.N.E.U., and when your Editor asked me to send a short article to your Magazine, I thought that some of the ideas I gained from the lecture might be of interest.

It will be difficult for any historian writing about the last quarter of the nineteenth century to put a finger on the predominating sin of the age; but to those living in it, it appears that it is in the terrible rush of life and consequent superficiality of thought that it sins most against humanity. And if we are superficial and scrappy and unsound in anything it is, above all, in our reading. Of the multitude of books there is no end, and of the claims on our time there is indeed no end, and so we read less and less, we remember less of what we do read, and we read almost solely books about books, and if we know the real books of the world at all it is probably only a bowing acquaintanceship and not a deep and lasting friendship.

Prof. Shuttleworth divided the books he recommended us to read into three classes: those which we read for professional purposes, those we read as a means of self-culture and mental improvement, and those which we read purely for relaxation.

Naturally no hard and fast line can be drawn between these three classes of books, but our reading should come under these heads. By professional books are meant those which keep us *directly* with our work—in our case the *Parents' Review* and psychological and educational books generally. Such reading is essential for every teacher and educationalist, but I think a note of warning may well be struck here. We may easily become too groovy as well as too superficial, and where interest is great and enthusiasm keen one's reading is apt to become entirely confined to this class of literature. The books which a teacher reads as preparation for her lessons would come under this head.